



Women's Earnings in the Ocean State

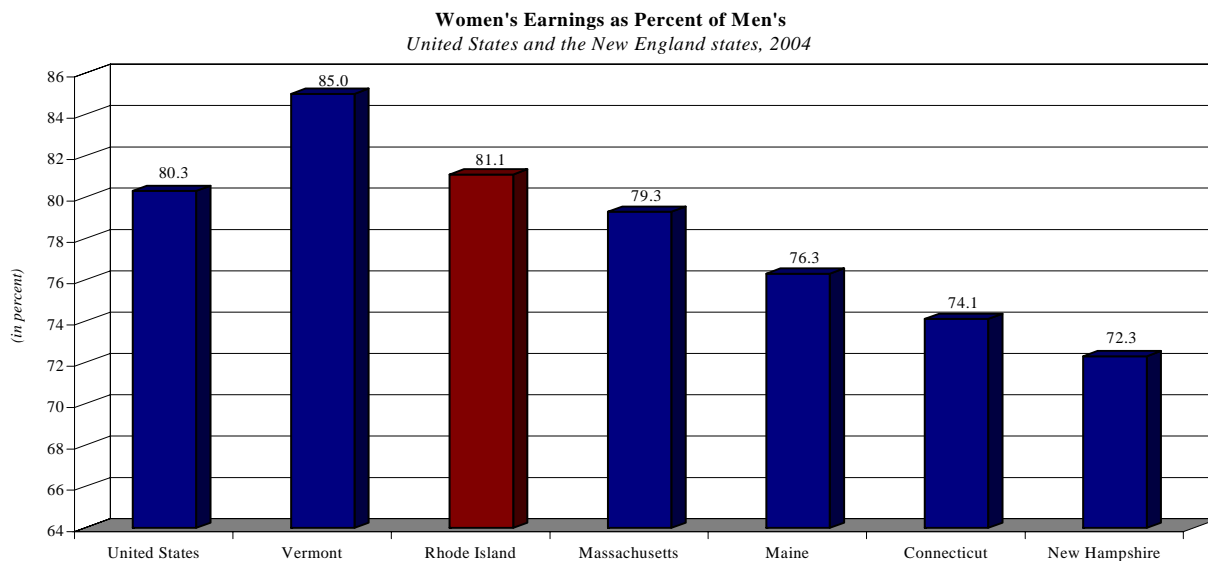
1998-2004



According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Rhode Island women working full-time earned 81.1 percent of their male counterparts in 2004. This was the second highest earnings ratio in New England and the thirteenth highest earnings ratio (tied with Colorado) in the country. Regionally, Vermont (85.0%) reported the smallest earnings differential between women and men, followed by Rhode Island (81.1%), Massachusetts (79.3%), Maine (76.3%), Connecticut (74.1%), and New Hampshire (72.3%). Throughout the fifty states, female-to-male earnings ratios ranged from a high of 87.1 percent in California to just 65.9 percent in Wyoming. Nationwide, women earned 80.3 percent of what men did in 2004, slightly below the Rhode Island ratio. The reasons for these earnings differentials between women and men vary. Although job discrimination is most often cited as the main reason women earn less than men, female worker earnings can also be impacted by breaks in or changes to their labor force participation (i.e. due to motherhood) and occupational mix due to physical differences between the sexes. For example, men generally have more natural physical strength than women and might be more suited to well-paying, heavy construction jobs.

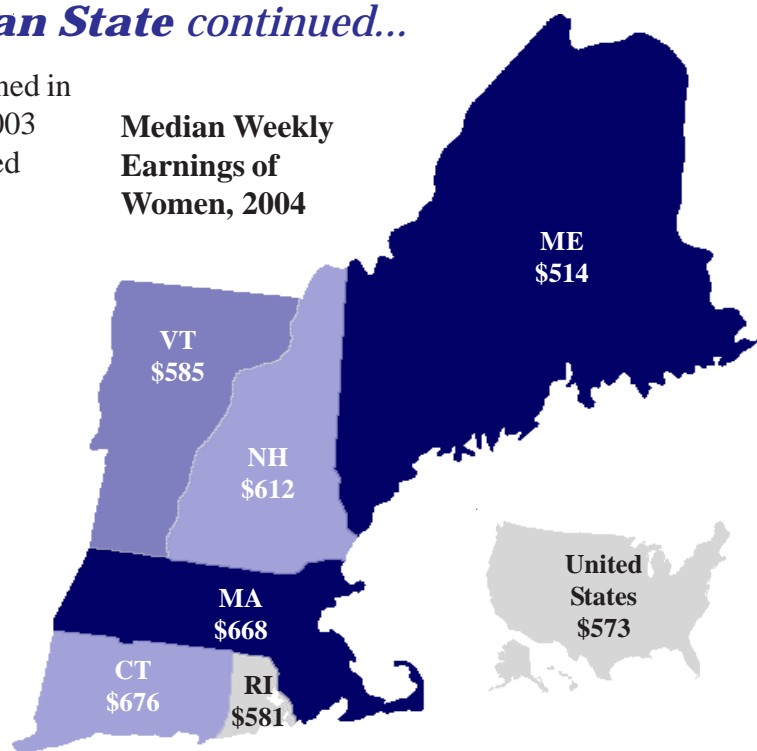
Since 1998, the earnings gap between Ocean State women and men working full-time has improved considerably when compared to regional neighbors and the nation as a whole. Whereas Rhode Island women had earned 71.2 percent of what men did in 1998, by 2004, the ratio had improved to 81.1 percent. This 9.9 percentage point change was the second highest recorded among the fifty states during this period, trailing only Georgia (+13.2 points). Within New England, Vermont's women-to-men earnings gap closed by 8.5 percentage points, followed by Connecticut (+4.6 points) and Massachusetts (+0.2 points). Meanwhile, women workers in both New Hampshire (-3.6 points) and Maine (-2.8 points) saw their earnings fall in comparison to their male counterparts. Nationally, the female-to-male earnings ratio improved by 4.0 percentage points, from 76.3 percent in 1998 to 80.3 percent in 2004.

During the period between 1998 and 2004, Rhode Island women experienced a much faster growth in median weekly earnings than men did. In 1998, females earned \$455 weekly compared to \$638 earned by males. By 2004, women's median weekly earnings had increased by 27.7 percent (+\$126), to \$581. In contrast, Ocean State males experienced just a 12.4 percent (+\$79) increase in median weekly earnings. Median weekly earnings for Rhode Island men actually *decreased* between 2003 and 2004, falling 0.8 percent to \$717.

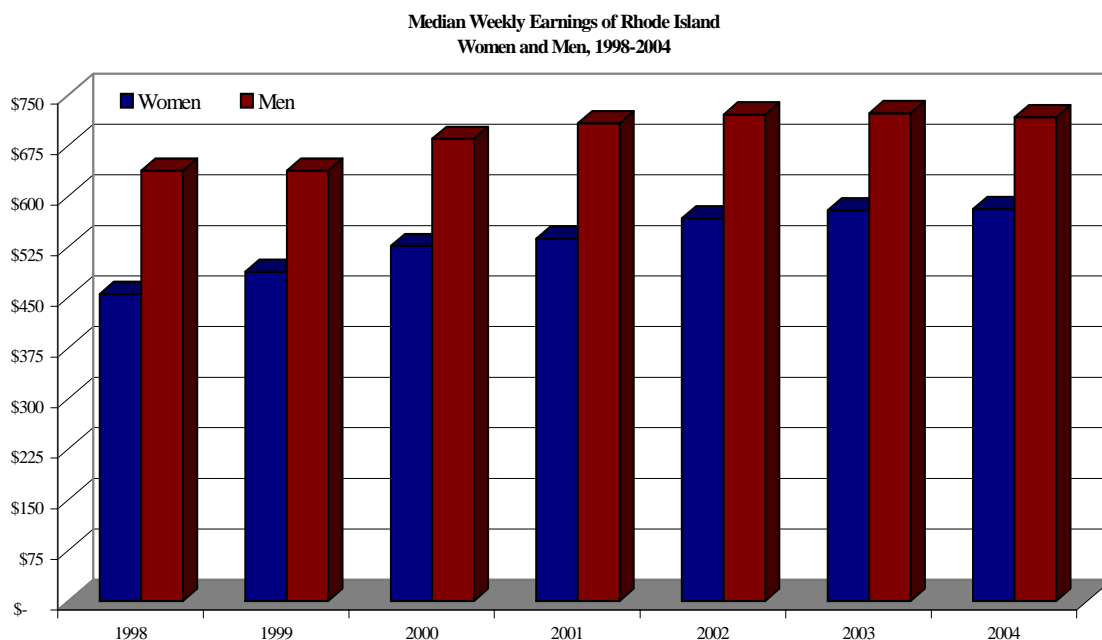


Women's Earnings in the Ocean State continued...

The weekly earnings of Rhode Island women weakened in comparison to other New England states between 2003 and 2004. At \$581, women in the Ocean State earned the fifth highest median weekly earnings total in the region in 2004, trailing female wage and salary workers in Connecticut (\$676), Massachusetts (\$668), New Hampshire (\$612), and Vermont (\$585). One year earlier, in 2003, Rhode Island women had reported the third highest weekly earnings total in New England. While median weekly earnings of women in the Ocean State remained relatively stable between 2003 and 2004, growing just 0.3 percent (+\$2), their counterparts in neighboring states experienced more sizeable wage growth, led by New Hampshire (+7.0%), Vermont (+5.4%), Maine (+1.8%), Connecticut (+1.5%), and Massachusetts (+0.5%). By 2004, only women in Maine (\$514) earned less than Rhode Island's female workers within the region.



Compared to the rest of the nation, in 2004, Rhode Island women (\$581) had the seventeenth highest median weekly earnings level, slightly above the United States median of \$573. Connecticut (\$676) and Massachusetts (\$668) reported the highest earnings for full-time working women, while the lowest earnings were reported in Arkansas (\$445) and Mississippi (\$463). However, between 2003 and 2004, earnings for Rhode Island women



slipped from the twelfth highest total in the United States (tied with Michigan). Again, although the median weekly earnings total for the state's female wage and salary workers grew by just 0.3 percent (+\$2) during this period, women across the nation saw their weekly earnings increase by 3.8 percent (+\$21).

Data is taken from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Highlights of Women's Earnings* series, 1998-2004. Earnings data refers to the median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, 16 years and over, as measured by the CPS. Data has not been adjusted for inflation.

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